

**YOU MATTER TO US - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board was held on Thursday, 30 January 2025.

**PRESENT:** Mayor C Cooke (Chair), P Storey (Vice-Chair), L Henman, D Jackson and Z Uddin.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** R Baker - Cleveland Police  
A Hart - Care Ambassador  
M Larkin - NHS  
H Sharp - Care Ambassador  
C O'Connor - Care Ambassador.

**OFFICERS:** D Alaszewski, V Banks, C Cannon, S Disbury, T Dunn, R Horniman, A Humble, C Lunn, C McGarry, G Nicholson, K Peacock and J Tynan.

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors E Clynch, M Nugent and L Young.

24/8 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

24/9 **MINUTES - YOU MATTER TO US - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - 3 OCTOBER 2024**

The minutes of the You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board meeting held on 3 October 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/10 **CARE EXPERIENCED YOUTH UPDATE**

Three Care Ambassadors, together with the Voice and Influence Manager delivered the Care Experienced Youth Update, which covered the period May to December 2024.

The following matters were raised/ discussed:

- One of the Care Ambassadors had attended a regional residential event with other young people from different regions and learnt about other Councils' work, and improvements still needed. Reference was made to work currently taking place around changes in language to enhance inclusivity.
- Care Ambassadors had attended a housing engagement event. During discussion, a Member queried progress in relation to housing provision. In response, the Director of Regeneration explained that tender documents for development works and support packages had gone out earlier in the day. Other work would take place when the new housing related post was made live. Properties were being purchased and would be refurbished as required; it was hoped that contractors would be in place by 31 March 2025.
- The Care Ambassadors had presented at Children's Participants Week, which they felt was a positive experience. It enabled the young people to showcase their lives and what needed to change and it had been inspirational to hear from other individuals.
- The Care Ambassadors had created a video for SHiFT.
- The Care Ambassadors had attended an awards ceremony in Manchester where they had received an award in their category. A number of activities were participated in; it had been a very positive experience.
- The Youth Council had helped to run a conference at HeadStart.
- Work had taken place to promote You Matter to Us welcome packs that were provided to young people entering care. The packs provided information to recipients and ensured that their voices were heard.
- Several events had been held across the period, including Halloween and Christmas parties. 85 young people had attended for Halloween and 16 young people for Christmas. Consideration had been given as to how young people may have felt,

emotionally, when attending such events, and activities planned accordingly. The events had been well received; positive feedback was read out to the Board.

- The Voice, Influence and Change Group had been undertaking various activities, including:
  - Participating in discussions around changing language/ terminology to become more inclusive and person friendly. A Change in Language Guide, which had been produced in consultation with young people, would be published next month.
  - Meeting with OFSTED, who had been very impressed with the work of the Care Ambassadors, as well as senior leaders and key decision makers to discuss the work and role of young people leaders.
  - Visits to Ninja Warrior and Scream Factory.
  - Over the next couple of months, opportunities for care experienced young adults, e.g. apprenticeships and volunteering, would be looked into. In addition to this work, an engagement and communications plan would be established with Pathways.
- Following relocation, the Care Ambassadors had recently attended a launch event for the Live Well Centre, which was very well attended.

A discussion ensued in relation to language and the potential impact that certain terminology could have on young people. The importance of positive and inclusive language was highlighted. As an example, the Care Ambassadors referred to the term 'care leavers' and indicated that this would be changed to 'care experienced', as it was felt to be more positive and professional. It was suggested that once the 'Change in Language Guide' had been published, it would be useful for a link to be provided to all Board Members/ representatives. In addition, it was felt that this would be a positive news story to share widely via the Council's Communications Team.

An NHS representative referred to the large geographical area covered by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and queried whether a regional role/ influential voice could be established. In response, the Care Ambassador advised that a Regional Co-ordinator role had been created and would be appointed to in due course. It was indicated that SHiFT had requested that the Care Ambassadors travel to London to discuss any matters in relevant forums. The NHS representative queried whether any assistance could be provided to the Care Ambassadors at the present time. In response, an Ambassador requested that the representative relay back, through the appropriate channels, the work that had been taking place in relation to language change.

A Cleveland Police representative commented on the excellent work that had been taking place and featured in the report. The Care Ambassadors were advised that the Police were able and willing to work with them in order to develop a more generalised understanding of young people, and to develop practice in various areas of policing. The Care Ambassadors thanked the representative and welcomed the suggestion.

A Member referred to the videos shown at the SHiFT launch and commented on both the positive and emotional participation made by the Care Ambassadors with these. The Executive Director of Children's Services referred to language change and OFSTED being held to account by the Care Ambassadors in relation to this. It was noted that the Care Ambassadors had been in place for two years and opportunities to strengthen their roles were currently being progressed. The Director would be in attendance at the next young peoples' meeting in late February to observe proceedings. Reference was made to increased mentoring work and improved access to digital means for young people that was currently being progressed. Matters around financial support would also be looked into.

An NHS representative referred to the possibility of holding informal sessions between formal meetings, to hear more from young people. The Democratic Services Officer would look into this.

The Chair thanked the Care Ambassadors and the Voice and Influence Manager for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

**AGREED that:**

1. **The publication of the 'Change in Language Guide' would be discussed with the Council's Communications Team to determine whether a news story could help publicise it.**
2. **The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/11

## **YOU MATTER TO US - PERFORMANCE**

*\*\*Owing to overlap in the reports for agenda items 5 and 6, the Board agreed to consider those items simultaneously.\*\**

The Director of Children's Care provided an update to the Board in respect of performance and Children in care.

The following matters were raised/ discussed:

- Performance/ statistical information in relation to various areas, including the number of children currently in care; regional vs. national placements; children in care and permanency plans; and rates in respect of adoptions and resident orders.
- The work being undertaken by dedicated staff to return children back into families; 31 children were currently being assessed. Work was taking place with courts to progress orders, which had been successful.
- The importance of prevention work to deter young people entering care and the escalation of risk.
- A Member referred to the reasons why care had ceased and queried what these were. In response, the Director of Children's Care advised that these would be clarified.
- The number of children in care was reducing, but it was highlighted that the goal was simply not to reduce numbers; it was about ensuring the best interests of the child and returning them to families where it was safe and able to do so. It was noted that a new team had recently been established to assist in supporting families and preventing entry to care. A financial grant had been received from the DfE, which would help to facilitate the return to family work. Consideration was given to the complexity of workloads and ensuring that the correct decisions were taken for children, from the outset. Assessment work was completed over several months to achieve the most appropriate outcome for the child/ren; the processes involved in this work were outlined to the Board.
- In relation to children missing, the representative from Cleveland Police referred to a child inspection report/ assessment and explained that around 300 missing from home reports were received each month, with about one third of these being CLA (7% of those assessed were deemed high risk; nationally this figure was 12%). Currently, 35% of overall children missing were classed as high risk. The Board noted that the number of reports involving children missing from care homes had reduced; reference was made to strategies that had assisted with this, including following the Philomena Protocol. The Executive Director of Children's Care commented on the challenges experienced in terms of children missing and referred to the internal procedures and communications currently in place. It was felt that it would be beneficial for strategic meetings between the police and the Local Authority to review processes and further develop links. Representatives discussed the involvement of the National Advocacy Service; the role, structure and supporting of return home interviews; monthly reporting mechanisms; safeguarding; and reasons why children went missing.
- Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) and the support being provided by the work readiness team and the Employment Hub. It was felt that the Care Ambassador role could be offered on an ongoing basis.
- A Member referred to page 24 of the agenda pack and the accommodation and homelessness statistics provided; some of the information was unknown. In response, it was explained that the data sets did require further review.
- A Member referred to Special Guardian Orders and queried the current position. In response, the Board was advised that a large scale piece of work was taking place as part of the transformation programme. Consideration was given to the work being carried out by individuals in caring for family members and the support that was being provided to them by the Local Authority.
- A Member referred to page 18 of the agenda pack and commented on the importance of context when looking at the duration of placements. The Director of Children's

Care indicated that, historically, permanency plans were not always progressed as wanted, however, these were now reviewed on a regular basis, with care planning meetings taking place. Reference was made to work currently on-going, which focused on children's homes, the duration of placements and long term planning.

- A Member referred to external placements outside of Middlesbrough, which were currently at their lowest level since 2019. It was queried whether the trajectory was decreasing. In response, the Board was advised that this was difficult to confirm. Work focused on making all attempts to keep children within Middlesbrough; care plans were being reviewed and the Family Placement Panel continued to operate. It was felt that things were moving in the right direction. It was indicated that a 20-mile boundary had been established in terms of allocating young people to care homes. In response to a query, the Board heard that the number of young people in external placement varied between 72-77, dependent upon the children entering care and the number of foster carers available.
- A Care Ambassador referred to the plans for the new children's homes in Middlesbrough and queried whether, once in operation, feedback boxes could be installed to enable the young people to provide feedback. In response, it was felt that this would be a positive initiative.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report and contributions to the meeting.

**AGREED that:**

1. **The Director of Children's Care would seek clarification regarding the statistics and reasons as to why care sometimes ceased.**
2. **The Director of Children's Care would look to obtain further information regarding the 'Accommodation types of 19-21 year olds' statistics.**
3. **The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/12 **CHILDREN IN CARE UPDATE**

As per minute no. 24/17.

24/13 **VIRTUAL SCHOOL - VIRTUAL COLLEGE APP - TASK AND FINISH GROUP - UPDATE**

The Head of Virtual School provided a verbal update in relation to the Virtual College app.

The following matters were raised/ discussed:

- The Board heard that the purpose of the app was for young people to access support and, to achieve the best from it, input from social care and education teams was paramount. The Director of Children's Care had held discussions with potential providers in terms of the content of the app, deliverability and other key features. Three companies were currently being looked at; the importance of scoping and ensuring selection of the most appropriate app was highlighted.
- A Care Ambassador commented that not all young people found apps conducive and queried whether a trial would take place with potential users. In response, it was indicated that a trial would be arranged. A short discussion ensued in relation to cost and accountability of apps, and the importance of input and testing by intended users. There was some concern raised from the Care Ambassadors in terms of a potential loss in personal connection between young people and professionals, but officers felt that the app would complement interaction because many young people shared information on apps that they otherwise could not verbalise, such as suicidal thoughts and feelings of loneliness and/or isolation. It was indicated that, at a previous meeting where the early stages of the app had been considered, positive feedback had been received.
- The Mayor suggested that, if possible, an informal meeting of the You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board would be arranged within the next six weeks to consider the following matters: 'Change in Language' guide; demonstration of the app; and return home interviews.

**AGREED that:**

1. **An informal meeting of the You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board would be scheduled, within the next six weeks, if possible, to consider the following: 'Change in Language' guide; a demonstration of the Virtual College app; and return home interviews.**
2. **The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/14

## **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROGRESS AND ATTAINMENT - AUTUMN TERM 2024**

The Head of Virtual School provided an update regarding Looked After Children Progress and Attainment, which covered the Autumn term 2024.

As a preliminary point, it was explained to the Board that the snapshot data covered a short period of time with low cohorts. As such, Members were advised to exercise caution when making any inferences from the data.

The following matters were raised/ discussed:

- Children Looked After demographics.
- Attitude to learning by year group. As the data was designated teachers' input, it was suggested that information from a children's perspective be included in future reports, if relevant and appropriate. Members felt that this would be useful.
- The context of Looked After Children was important to understand the progress being made by students. 65% of Looked After Children were making good progress; 18% were still being assessed. Progress was impacted at KS3 and KS4. Year 3 also showed less progress while Years 1 and 2 did well, with over 85% making good progress in all areas.
- The statistics for KS4 and KS11 progression were low. The importance of context for Looked After Children was reiterated; barriers included: children being new to care; difficulties in recruiting foster carers for teenagers; significant medical issues; changes in schools; and EBSA. 14 Children in KS4 were not currently on a school roll.
- Placement changes had a significant impact; each additional change of care placement after age 11 was associated with one-third of a grade less at GCSE. From Years 7 to 11, there was currently 185 Looked After Children. 96% of Looked After Children had moved placement since entering care; almost 25% of secondary school aged Looked After Children had had five or more placement moves since entering care.
- In terms of school changes, it was noted that young people in care who had changed school in Years 10 or 11 scored over five grades less than those who did not. 21 of 88 students in KS4 had experienced a school move.
- Regarding school absence, for every 5% of possible school sessions missed due to school absences, young people in care scored over two grades less at GCSE. From Years 7 to 11, 86 out of 187 students were below 95%.
- Overall attendance for all statutory school aged Looked After Children from 1 September to 22 November 2024 was 86.2%. 8.1% of absences were authorised, and 5.8% of absences were unauthorised. Overall attendance by key stage was: KS1 – 94.5%; KS2 – 97.8%; KS3 – 85.6%; and KS4 – 70.3%.
- In terms of school suspensions, it was noted that these had significant impact. For every additional day of school missed due to fixed-term suspensions, young people in care scored one-sixth of a grade less at GCSE. From Years 6 to 11, 23 students had been suspended. Since the start of the academic year, from 1 September to 22 November 2024, there had been a total of 42 suspensions, for 85 days, by 21 children. Of the 21 children that had had a suspension this academic year:
  - 11 (52.4%) were female.
  - 12 (57.1%) were suspended from a school within Middlesbrough
  - 1 (4.8%) child was in KS2, 7 (33.3%) were in KS3, and 13 (61.9%) were in KS4.
  - 5 (23.8%) had an EHCP, 12 (57.1%) had SEN support, and 4 (19%) had no SEN.
- Regarding placement type, it was indicated that young people living in residential or another form of care at age 16 scored over six grades less than those who were in kinship or foster care. 53 students were not placed in kinship or foster care.
- In terms of school type, young people who were in special schools at age 16 scored over 14 grades lower in their GCSEs compared to those with the same characteristics

who were in mainstream schools. Those in pupil referral units with the same characteristics scored almost 14 grades lower. From years 7 to 11, 58 out of 187 students, attended a provision other than a mainstream school.

The Chair thanked the Head of Virtual School for the information provided.

**AGREED that:**

- 1. The Head of Virtual School would look into the suggestion of including information from the children's perspective, in future 'attitude to learning' reports.**
- 2. The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/15

**LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ATTENDANCE AND SUSPENSION - AUTUMN TERM 2024**

The Head of Virtual School provided an update regarding attendance and suspension for Looked After Children in respect of the autumn term 2024.

The following matters were raised/ discussed:

- Good school attendance was defined as attending school at least 95% of the time. This meant that a student should not have missed more than 10 days in a school year. High attendance rates were crucial because they were directly linked to academic success and overall well-being.
- The difference between authorised and non-authorised attendance was key. It was indicated that further work was required with schools to understand how this was being managed.
- The overall attendance for all statutory school aged Looked After Children from 1 September to 22 November 2024 was 86.2%. 8.1% of absences were authorised; 5.8% of absences were unauthorised. Overall attendance by key stage was: KS1 – 94.5%; KS2 – 97.8%; KS3 – 85.6%; and KS4 – 70.3%. The issue of attendance in Middlesbrough had been recognised and work was taking place to address it.
- A Member queried whether attendance changed in the period between a young person entering and leaving care. In response, the Board heard that attendance on the whole did improve; statistics would be provided.
- Permanent exclusion of Looked After Children was considered a last resort due to the significant impact it could have on their education and well-being. National guidance encouraged schools to work closely with social workers and virtual schools to provide support and prevent exclusions whenever possible. Although there had been four occasions where a child had come close to exclusion this year, no Middlesbrough Looked After Child had been excluded for seven years. Nationally in 2022/23, 50 Looked After Children had been excluded. The Board heard that an inclusion strategy was in place to assist with exclusion and suspension issues.
- The Board heard that more vulnerable children with HCP were more likely to be suspended. Safeguarding training for designated teachers had been undertaken. Members discussed the multiple roles that designated teachers may have had - the Head of Virtual School indicated that this would be raised at a future Annual Virtual School Conference.
- A Member referred to mental health in respect of school-age females and queried whether dialogue could be opened with this age group to determine why they felt they were being excluded. The Head of Virtual School advised that this would be looked into.
- Work had been taking place in respect of SEND and ensuring that inclusion priorities had been identified and supported.

The Chair thanked the Head of Virtual School for the information provided.

**AGREED that:**

- 1. The Head of Virtual School would look at the possibility of providing statistics to show the change in attendance figures of young people before entering care and then afterwards as a care experienced young person.**
- 2. In relation to school exclusions and the deterioration of mental health in schools, particularly amongst girls, the Head of Virtual School would look into**

- the suggestion of asking pupils why they felt they were being excluded.**
- 3. The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/16 **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN WITH SEND**

The Head of Virtual School provided an update regarding Looked After Children with SEND.

The following matters were raised/ discussed:

- Compared to national Looked After Children, there was less diagnosed SEND for Middlesbrough Looked After Children.
- More Middlesbrough Looked After Children had a SEND support plan than an EHCP.
- Nationally, Looked After Children with an EHCP was 54%; Middlesbrough Looked After Children were below with 22% of school aged Looked After Children with an EHCP.
- 65% OF EHCPs were for SEMH needs.
- The second highest primary need was Cognition and Learning and Autistic Spectrum Continuum.
- There were 28% more males than females with an EHCP.
- There were more Looked After Children with an EHCP attending a school in the Borough; however, the data showed that more young people in Years 8 and 10 attended an out of Borough school.
- KS4 had the highest number of Looked After Children with an EHCP at 48%.
- There were 19 Looked After Children with SEND who were not receiving 25 hours of education; 15 with an EHCP and 4 with SEN support.
- There were 11 CLA with SEND that were not on a school roll; 10 with an EHCP and 1 with SEN support.
- Since the start of the academic year, from 1 September to 22 November 2024, 5 (23.8%) Looked After Children who had an EHCP had been suspended; 12 (57.1%) with SEN support had been suspended and 4 (19%) with no SEN had been suspended.
- Post-16: 32 (52.5%) of the 61 young people with SEND were EET.
- Details regarding SEND and inclusion support made available for school level; inclusion and outreach; and EHCP were provided.
- A case study was provided to the Board.
- The SEND and inclusion priorities 2025 were outlined to Members, as follows:
  - Reduce suspensions and exclusions for children and young people with SEND.
  - Reintegration into mainstream for children and young people who had been permanently excluded.
  - Greater inclusion for children and young people with an EHC Plan in mainstream schools.
  - Implementation of the Ranges document to support appropriate identification of needs and timely interventions to support children and young people with SEND.
  - Full implementation of CAPITA Portal for the digitisation of EHC Plans.
  - Continue to transform Annual Review process for existing EHC Plans.

The Chair thanked the Head of Virtual School for the information provided.

**NOTED**

24/17 **YOU MATTER TO US - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair advised that the Work Programme was currently being looked at in terms of allocating the remaining reports scheduled for this year, to the two meetings that were left, i.e. 13 March 2025 and 3 April 2025.

The Chair advised that the Work Programme would be circulated to all officers/ representatives for review. It was requested that the officers/ representatives identify an appropriate meeting date for their respective reports to be assigned, and advise the Democratic Services Officer accordingly.

**AGREED that:**

1. **The Democratic Services Officer would email the Work Programme to officers/ representatives; officers/ representatives to allocate respective reports to the appropriate meeting date and advise the Democratic Services Officer accordingly.**
2. **The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/18

**ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

None.